

Did the Marines better understand the nature of the Vietnam conflict and was the Combined Action Program more suitable than Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in dealing with insurgents?

CSC 2000

Subject Area – Strategic Issues

## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Did the Marines better understand the nature of the Vietnam conflict and was the Combined Action Program more suitable than Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in dealing with insurgents?

**Author:** Major Kenneth Eugene Wynn, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** General Westmoreland believed that pure military action, mass mobilization and search and destroy missions, were the solutions to defeating the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong guerrillas. The Marines better understood the nature of the Vietnam conflict and on a small scale, without sufficient support, were able to combat the spread of communism more effectively than any other civilian or military organization.

**Discussion:** During the Vietnam conflict the Marines of 3rd Battalion 4th Marines reconstituted a program which was utilized during military action in Haiti, Nicaragua and Santo Domingo conflicts. The Combined Action Program was an effective means of combating insurgents/guerrilla actions. The Viet Cong relied heavily on the popular support of the people and the Marines best understood the importance of separating/safeguarding the people from the guerillas. By doing this the Marines effectively reduced the Viet Cong's requirements to exist: food, ammunition, supplies, money and most importantly recruits. Without the support of the people the Viet Cong would eventually cease to function and their cause would be suppressed. General Westmoreland failed to understand how important this lifeline was or just chose to believe that it was not a factor. Instead, he pursued the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Regular Army through conventional warfare.

Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) was established in Vietnam in 1960 and was a myriad of civilian agencies providing support to the South Vietnamese people. However, it was not until 1967 under the leadership of Robert Komer did these agencies combine their efforts in conjunction with the U.S. Army. Although the **new** CORDS (civil-military) experienced some success in the cities and heavily populated areas it failed to address the much need concentrated focus in the hamlet and villages where sympathy and support for the Viet Cong were prominent. Under the philosophy of guerrilla warfare the Viet Cong avoided the enemy and continued to plague the smaller isolated hamlets. CORDS was too much, too late, and in the wrong place. The Marines were still left with the responsibility of confronting the overwhelming insurgency problem until the lack of money and resources forced them to abandon the concept.

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>2000</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2000 to 00-00-2000</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Did the Marines better understand the nature of the Vietnam conflict and was the Combined Action Program more suitable than Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) in dealing with insurgents?</b>			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Marine Corps War College, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5067</b>			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>45</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

**Recommendation/Suggestions:** If the United States Military is involved in future conflicts which focus on insurgence, civil unrest or guerrilla actions, senior military leaders must carefully review revolutionary/guerrilla strategy and the four models which can be used against them: Foco, Maoist, Leninist and Urban.

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## **Introduction**

During the height of the Vietnam conflict the U.S. Marines employed a program of suppressing Viet Cong activity through small unit actions. This program had proven to be successful during previous military actions in Haiti, Nicaragua and Santo Domingo. The scope of this program extended beyond small unit patrols and other offensive measures. It primarily centered on the integration of local law enforcement/militia with a squad of U.S. Marines. Their combined efforts included unified combat operations as well as civil development, village security, medical attention for the local people and village guidelines.

The most important aspect in the success of the program was that the Marines lived among the villagers and became a part of their community. This relationship helped establish the trust and support that the Marines needed to be successful in their mission. The Viet Cong relied on the villages to support their military activity in the area. They preyed on people who could easily be intimidated into supporting their needs. These villages were their source for food, water, money, weapons, new recruits and, most importantly, information on the American forces. As a result of Marines taking residence in these villages they were able to obstruct the Viet Cong's lifeline and often render them ineffective.

I will explain why the CAP was not embraced by General Westmoreland, the senior Military Advisory Commander in Vietnam (MACV), and detail the conflict between him and the Marines which hindered the program. The reader needs to understand that the country of Vietnam was going through a "decolonization" period after years of Chinese, Japanese and French rule. The United States discouraged European colonization and supported independence for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. It would later change its position and support France's reoccupation in an effort to safeguard Vietnam from communist influence. During French occupation the United States continued to provide aid until the Viet Minh ultimately defeated France. American arrogance allowed them to believe that they knew what was good for Vietnam. They refused to participate in the Geneva Agreement, which called for the division of Vietnam, with communist influence controlling the North. At the time the U. S. position was that they would not violate the terms of the agreement but would monitor and advise the South Vietnam Government.

Eleven years later the United States began sending combat troops to South Vietnam. This action not only violated their agreement but involved them in a situation which was not fully understood, nor prepared to see to the end. The purpose of my thesis is to explain the importance of the Combined Action Program (CAP) during Vietnam and to demonstrate that the Marines better understood the nature of the Viet Cong conflict than did General Westmoreland and even the Johnson Administration.

## **Chapter 1**

### **PLANNING FOR FAILURE**

The United States cautiously eased its way into Vietnam only to find that it was trying to apply a "Band-Aid to a sunken chest wound". American forces were tangled in something horrid before anyone could clearly define their role to the American people, or before the Johnson administration could rethink its strategic policy. The United States' initial plan was to send advisors, supplies, and economic support to assist the South Vietnamese. Americans continually found themselves in roles that should have been assumed by the South Vietnamese. When Congress became frustrated over the outcome of a particular project, U.S. Forces took the lead from the Vietnamese and did it themselves in order to achieve results. This was a classic example of enabling behavior by the military.

The U.S. resorted to attrition warfare relying on firepower, mechanization, and mobility. These tactics were later changed to "flexible response", a retaliatory means through which to achieve their goal. The nature of such a policy was a graduated response to whatever the enemy did. Everyone was aware of the policy, however confusion within the military was over how to conduct or implement it.

It was a civil war where guerilla ideology and tactics was the recipe for an unlimited war, which the United States was not prepared to fight. The United States went to Vietnam believing that the time-tested conventional ring of war was sufficient to stop

communism aggression. In short it went looking for a fight and got swallowed up in the series of hamlets that immersed the countryside.

Ho Chi Minh and his generals understood that they should not limit themselves to an estimation of the enemy's forces but also consider the exploitation of the people in order to achieve victory. Ho Chi Minh followed history and was familiar with the writings of Mao Tse Tung. The North Vietnamese were not going to play to the strengths of the American forces by trying to slug it out in conventional warfare and become decisively engaged. They did not do it with the French and the U.S. should not have expected anything different.

Lieutenant General Philip Davidson, chief military intelligence officer (J-2, MACV), believed that by not having clear goals and by placing restraints on their own forces, the "United States gave the North Vietnamese the strategic initiative, a prize of singular value, by the restraints the various American administrations placed on the forces in Vietnam."<sup>1</sup> Rules of engagement were placed on areas of operation and types of missions because the United States was still operating in an advisory capacity and any further involvement would be in violation of the Geneva Accords Agreement.

By 1964, President Johnson clearly realized that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a mistake and was looking for a way to get out of it gracefully. In the ensuing months each decision he made moved the United States closer to war, although he seemed not to recognize that fact.<sup>2</sup> After President Johnson safely secured his victory

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<sup>1</sup> Lt. General Philip B. Davidson, USA (RET), Secrets of the Vietnam War (Novato, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1990). p 17

<sup>2</sup> Major H. R. McMasters, USA Dereliction of Duty (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 1997) p 325



over Republican Barry Goldwater in November of 1964, McNamara and Westmoreland had plans to mobilize more troops. Members of Congress had agreed to send 23,000 advisors to Vietnam, in December. March of 1965 saw the arrival of the first official combat troops, which included two battalions of Marines. Their task was to guard the air base at Da Nang.<sup>3</sup> General Westmoreland wanted to continue his effort of mass mobilization in seeking out the enemy in the hills. "He believed that the Marines should be trying to find the enemy's main forces and bring them to battle, thereby putting them on the run and reducing the threat they possess to the population."<sup>4</sup> That meant the Marines needed to move inland, away from the coastline, from the villages and cities in order to seek the enemy and destroy them.<sup>5</sup> General Westmoreland did not want the Marines to abandon the conventional warfighting doctrine of using mass firepower and search and destroy operations.

Some historians would later write that General Westmoreland was not in favor of the pacification role that the Marines had taken in I Corps. He wanted every available man out searching for the enemy and the impact of pacification reduced the strength of his fighting force. General Westmoreland had been an old horse soldier, brought up in the days of World War II and the Korean War; attrition was the mission during most of his career. Although a proven soldier, this "different kind of war"<sup>6</sup> challenged Westmoreland's abilities and threatened Johnson's political popularity.

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<sup>3</sup> Edmonds, The War in Vietnam, p xvii

<sup>4</sup> General William C. Westmoreland, USA (Ret) A Soldier Reports (New York, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc, 1976) p 165 (hereafter Westmoreland)

<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons: The US Marines Other War In Vietnam (New York, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989) p 22 (hereafter Peterson)

<sup>6</sup> On July 28, 1965 President Johnson announced to an audience of 200 reporters that he was sending another 50,000 troops to Vietnam. During his brief he referred to the situation in Vietnam as "A Different Kind of War."

“Limited war theorists devoted much of their time explaining *why* their type of war should be fought rather than *how* it was to be fought.”<sup>7</sup> General Eric Shinseki, present Chief of Staff of the Army, stated “... when generals don’t know what to do they do what they know.”<sup>8</sup> General Westmoreland waged battles on multiple fronts: against the Congress, the NVA, the Viet Cong, and the American people. All eyes were on him in anticipation of how he was going to set things right in Vietnam. With this pressure, General Westmoreland did not expect friction from Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, Fleet Marine Force Pacific Commander, on how to best utilize his Marines in Vietnam.

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<sup>7</sup> George C. Herring, LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1994) p 5 (hereafter Herring)

<sup>8</sup> A general comment made by General Shinseki during his “Joint Vision 2010” address to Command and Staff College Students (Feb’ 11, 2000) His statement is unrelated to General Westmoreland’s actions during Vietnam.

## Chapter 2

### CAP---THE SOLUTION

On January 9, 1967, Sergeant James D. White, CAP Squad leader, left the village of Binh Nghia. Before he reached home, his mother had received two letters. Trao, the acting village chief, wrote this one.

*Today I write this letter to you. I hope when him leaving here you still remember me allways. My name is "trao," second village chief working with Sgt. White and Sq. about 4 months ago. Our people thank him very much, because he is very good man. Evry day he is a few to sleep he works to much. All my cadre very happy. Sgt. White and his squad evry days night go to empust with P.F.. My village no more V.C. Stay evry one here at Fort Page is very sad because of his departure, but at the same time is very happy for him, because here be able to go home to see his family. Sgt. White worked to hard at this duty station. They work very hard never look tired. If one of my people get seck or wtunded by V.C. Sgt White makes it to a radio and calls a helicopter for help. A helicopter is very forte for removing the seck or wtunded. My people are very poor and when to see a marine they are very happy. When V.C. come to people, people come and talk to Sgt. White so Sgt. White can talk to the P.F. and the marine to fight the V.C.. Maybe die. It's a late letter but I'll say Happy New Year to you. Jod bless you all*

*Your friend always,  
Ho Yan Trao<sup>9</sup>*

Lieutenant General Louis Walt, III Marine Amphibious Force Commander and  
Lieutenant General Krulak, Commanding Officer Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, disagreed

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<sup>9</sup> Francis J. West Jr, The Village (Wisconsin: Wisconsin Press Ltd.,1972) p 161

with Westmoreland's use of the marines. It was General Kulak that publicly argued that:

It is our conviction that if we can destroy the guerrilla fabric among the people, we will automatically deny the larger units the food and intelligence and the taxes, and the other support that need. At the same time, if the big units want to sortie out the mountains and come down to where they can be cut up by our supporting arms, the Marines are glad to take them on, but the real war is among the people and not among the mountains.<sup>10</sup>

A major controversy arose between the services, but as General Westmoreland explained, "I was very familiar with the doctrine approach of the Marines and their capabilities, I just wanted them to expand their operations away from the coastline."<sup>11</sup> A compromise was achieved and the Marines role consisted of a three-pronged effort comprised of search and destroy missions, counter-insurgency operations and pacification.<sup>12</sup> During this period the focus of effort was against the Viet Cong, conventional forces that were dispersed throughout I Corps.

In 1965, American forces conducted a number of operations in order to gain advantage over the North Vietnamese, "rice denial/ security operations, hamlet isolation and search, and with the Combined Action Program."<sup>13</sup> The Combined Action Program was organized in Aug 1965; it was a different approach to stopping the spread of communism. The program tried to achieve two political goals:

Sustained protection of the rural population from the insurgents, which also helps to deprive the insurgency of its rural popular base; and generating rural support for the Saigon regime via programs meeting rural needs and cementing the rural areas political and administratively to the center.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons, p 22

<sup>11</sup> Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p 165

<sup>12</sup> Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons, p 23

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> R. W. Komer, Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam, (The Rand Corporation/Working Paper, Prepared for the Sixty-six Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 1970) p 2 (hereafter Komer)

To the Marines on the ground, it was personal involvement with the Vietnamese people helping them through their daily lives, while establishing a relationship built on trust. In gaining acceptance and respect, the Marines could be more efficient in their duties in turn reducing the number of killed in action and wounded in action while trying to achieve their overall mission.

## **Development**

The Combined Action Program grew from an operational concern from a commanding officer not having enough manpower to accomplish his mission. Lt. Col. William W. Taylor, Commanding Officer of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, was tasked with the security of the American occupied airfield, Phu Bai, in I Corps Tactical Zone. Col. Taylor's recruitment of local Vietnamese militia, called Poplar Forces, to reinforce his Marines in the security of the airbase and surrounding villages was the start of the Joint Action Platoon. Under the guidance and philosophy of General Krulak, the concept of using the Popular Forces as augmentees worked well, however there was a strong need to be able to communicate, teach basic squad tactics, weapons maintenance and employment.

Lt. Col. Taylor recruited an officer within his battalion, Lt. Paul Ek who spoke fluent Vietnamese, to set up a program that provided classes on Vietnamese customs, village political structure and basic language. Lt. Ek taught the Marines how Vietnamese viewed them and how they could improve relations within the villages.<sup>15</sup> After training, these Marines were assigned to a village and operated with the Popular Forces

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<sup>15</sup> Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons, p 24

providing security. “The adopt a village” concept started out with Marines conducting daylight patrols and then moving back to the platoon base camp. The operations quickly expanded to night patrols and within weeks the Marines resided within the village and there was total integration with the people.

The Marines that were assigned to the village remained attached to the village until their tour in Vietnam was finished or one was wounded or killed in action. Once assigned to a village there was no rotation or removal from one village to another. This was important in order to maintain continuity and to establish rapport with the people. By January 1966, after five months with this program, the CAC, Combined Action Company, formally known as the Joint Action Program was retitled the Combined Action Program by Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Tai, Commanding General for ARVN Forces operating within I Corps Tactical Zone. The Combined Action Program received approval to expand its operations to Da Nang, Chu LAI and the Quang Tri Valley.<sup>16</sup>

General Krulak and General Walt continued to push for the development of more CAP's despite the fact that it decreased the manpower they had available for their conventional combat forces. The management of forces for this program disturbed General Westmoreland and cross service bickering about how best to defeat the North Vietnamese ensued.<sup>17</sup> Although the Marines were still fulfilling their other missions, General Westmoreland believed that every man available should be sweeping the countryside searching for the enemy.

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<sup>16</sup> Jack Shulimson, US Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year 1968, (History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997) p 621 (hereafter Shulimson)

<sup>17</sup> Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons, p 27

Westmoreland was constantly put in the uncomfortable position of responding to Congress on why the armed forces were not successful. He often responded with the need for additional men and equipment and the Marines were not helping his plea. The CAP gave the appearance that the Marines were playing den mother to the locals by taking on personal projects, and forgetting about why they were in Vietnam. This was deemed a waste of men and man-hours.<sup>18</sup>

Lieutenant General Krulak's thinking was that the guerrilla forces were as important as the skilled NVA. Somehow, he might have failed in articulating his point to General Westmoreland. General Krulak continued to make public statements about how the United States was going in the wrong direction. He stressed that integration with the South Vietnamese was the key to winning the war and that MACV should embrace the CAP. Krulak also believed that the organized enemy was the country's enemies, but to the farmer, who received little or no support from the politicians at the capitol, the guerrilla was the enemy. "The farmer may be pleased to learn that the organized enemy that threatened his country has been stopped, but he will be eternally grateful to anyone who can lift him and his family the milestone of guerrilla terror and enslavement."<sup>19</sup>

General Westmoreland's point was simple: United States military strategy had proven itself throughout history. That strategy was to execute operations that would cut off the enemy's supplies, destroy his infrastructure or hinder his ability to mass his weapons. One or a combination of those operations will eventually result in victory.

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<sup>18</sup> Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* p 166

<sup>19</sup> Lt. General Victor H. Krulak, Article: "The Guerilla and Reality," *The Marine Corps Gazette* p42

General Krulak was adamant about how the Vietcong's guerrilla infrastructure was largely internal. The VC did not have a supply line, and his food, money, water; clothing was at the next village that he could steal it from. His ammunition and weapons were confiscated from the poorly trained PF member's or taken from a farmer. He also acquired weapons from fallen North Vietnamese regulars or fellow VC. The Viet Cong other weapons of choice were primitive traps and mines that were homemade; there were no factories manufacturing and shipping them to him.<sup>20</sup> Krulak's point was why should the Marines stumble through the hills, in mass, looking for the VC. His critical requirement or ability to exist was right here within the villages that surrounded American positions.

While we cannot leave any operational sector untended, all of them being important, the main target is still the man in the black pajamas with his burp gun. The war turns primarily on his destruction, and this can be achieved only by a painstaking program that aims first and foremost to separate him from the people upon whom his survival depends.<sup>21</sup>

## **Purpose**

The initial purpose of the Combined Action Platoon was to provide protection for the village and its people from insurgents. It evolved into civic action that in turn, established close ties with the villagers. The villagers gained respect for the Marines because they resided in the village with them. By living among the Vietnamese, Marines were not compelled to conduct their weekly raids in order to clear the village of Viet Cong. This minimized the "everyone is a suspect" attitude. The reduction of harassment towards the Vietnamese people afforded the Marines to observe that the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



people would rather not support the Viet Cong but were intimidated and unable to defend themselves. They preferred to work their crops, continue their way of life, and live in peace.

The people started to believe that the village, surrounding areas and the inhabitants meant something to the American Forces. The Marines worked closely with the PF's in tactics and improving the PF's effectiveness in combating the enemy, however, the team went further, assisting in farming, erecting schools, and digging or improving wells. Medical attention was also a large part of the program. The respect that was gained from assisting the people was invaluable. These somewhat meaningless tasks to the average person opened lines of communication and helped the Marines to understand the Vietnamese people. It also restored pride among the people and allowed them to help themselves. The CAP received a formal mission statement stating that its was developed to:

1. Destroy the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) within the villages or hamlet area of responsibility.
2. Protect public security and help maintain law and order.
3. Protect the friendly infrastructure
4. Protect bases and line of communication within the villages and hamlets.
5. Organize people's intelligence nets.
6. Participate in civic action and conduct propaganda against the Viet Cong.<sup>22</sup>

The Combined Action concept was not something new. It had proven to be successful in the past. The CAP had been applied with great success in Haiti (1915-1934), in

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<sup>22</sup> William R. Corson, The Betrayal, (New York, NY: Norton & Company, 1968) p 184 (hereafter Corson)

Nicaragua (1926-1933) and in Santo Domingo (1916-1926).<sup>23</sup> The program was relatively new in Vietnam and still experimental. Not all Marine Units in country were operating as a CAP unit, and there were still units conducting conventional operations. However, this [CAP] was the direction that the Commanding Officer, FMFPac and the Commanding General of III MAF wanted to go and they fought hard to maintain this approach in combating the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.

## **Organization**

The squad leader, a Marine Sergeant or Corporal was in charge of the Combined Action Platoon. He was a highly qualified and tactically proficient Marine that could operate on his own with minimal guidance and be trusted to make the right decision. The squad was built around that sergeant or corporal leadership with three subordinate leaders called team leaders (tmlr), who held the rank of corporal or lance corporal. The notional squad had thirteen members in it, although, due to the lack of manpower for various reasons the squad could be as few as four or five Marines until replacements were assigned. The Popular Forces who augmented the Marines brought an important intelligence piece (Viet Cong habits and practices) to the team. “The Popular Forces may well be the most important military people in Vietnam. They have something real to fight for—their own hamlet; their own country”.<sup>24</sup>

A South Vietnamese Lieutenant led the Popular Forces. The size of the PF's platoon varied in strength from village to village, and ranged from fifteen to thirty-five in a Popular Force Platoon (see appendix). The Marines organized, trained and sometimes

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<sup>23</sup> Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, First to Fight, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Inc.,1984) p 211 (hereafter Krulak)

<sup>24</sup>Krulak, First to Fight, p 209

equipped the PF's. The PF's were proud individuals who needed only assistance in organization and direction in order to provide the best security for their village. Many Vietnamese men preferred to fight within the PF organization because it meant that they could be close to their families and crops. The alternative meant that they would be sent by the village chief to fight with the South Vietnamese Regular Army. The men were well aware of this and devoted themselves to the mission of protecting their family and village in fear of being sent away.

In 1967, the program had expanded to the point that it was necessary for a CAP headquarters to be established. The inability to support the squad leader became a big concern along with logistical issues that continually hampered missions. Many times the battalion in which that squad came from could not meet their needs because of the lack of equipment. The Combined Action Program was not a recognized unit therefore they did not have an approved table of equipment or table of organization.<sup>25</sup> The Battalion Commander from whom the CAP squads came from was burdened with fulfilling the primary mission, as well as the mission of CAP without the benefit of additional men or equipment. Given that the Battalion Commander only has twenty-seven rifle squads by T/O in his battalion, he could easily find himself over tasked. If he was tasked with providing thirteen squads for the CAP he could easily deplete his resources of men and equipment trying to fulfill all of his other missions. Rifle squads are not designed to work independently for sustained periods of time without company or battalion support.

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<sup>25</sup> Before a new unit or organization is formed a written proposal and justification has to be submitted to Headquarters Marine Corps. If the proposal is approved, HQMC will assign the newly formed unit a table of organization (assign Marines by billet and rank to man that unit) and a table of equipment (assign equipment for their mission and designate an established supporting unit to meet logistical, service and supporting needs). HQMC will provide other requirements such as chain of command, mission statement, training requirements, funding, etc.

During February of 1967 Lieutenant General Walt assigned Lt. Colonel William R. Corson as the Combined Action Company Officer. This billet was located in the Marine Amphibious Force G-3 section. The G-3 section on the MAF level was responsible for training and operations. Lt. Col. Corson was tasked with the restructuring of the CAP to include developing Standard Operating Procedures, organizing a formal school, requisition of logistical material, screening of applicants and obtaining an approved table of organization. The continued expansion of the program resulted in the establishment of the Combined Action Group headquarters in Da Nang with administrative support over the Combined Action Company's.<sup>26</sup> By the end of 1967, seventy-nine platoons were organized into fourteen Combined Action Company's and three Combined Action Groups.<sup>27</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> CAG was based in Chi Lai, and responsible for operations in the two southern provinces, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai. 2<sup>nd</sup> CAG at Da Nang controlled platoons in Quang Nam providence and 3<sup>rd</sup> CAG, at Phu Bai controlled operations in the two northern providences, Quang Tri and Thua Thien.<sup>28</sup>

### **Center of Gravity**

The adoption of a village proved to be advantageous for the Popular Forces, Marines and people of the village. The CAP established trust between the servicemen and Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese opened up the desperately needed lines of communication with the Marines. The villagers began to feel comfortable with discussing the problems that they were having with the Viet Cong, and explained their fears and concerns about taking an active part against them. The exchange of

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<sup>26</sup> Shulimson, US Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year 1968, p 617

<sup>27</sup> Shulimson, US Marines in Vietnam, p 597

<sup>28</sup> Robert Klyman, An Alternative Not Taken, MS, Honors Thesis, Department of History, The University of Michigan, 1986, p 21

information allowed the US Marines to carry out their missions while protecting the citizens and ensuring their commitment to them. A family atmosphere and cohesion was established because the Marines didn't come and go, but stayed in support of the people in the event that the Viet Cong retaliated against the village. The Marines lived among them, ate with them, farmed with them, conducted village projects with them, but foremost kept the Viet Cong from being able to support their war effort. This system paid off as it quickly gave the villages the sense that "they were all in it together", and that they would prevail or fail as one. It was extremely important that the Marines live among the people, particularly because the villagers knew that the Marines had nothing to gain by staying. In the eyes of the PF's and the Vietnamese people, it became clear that the Americans were not the enemy and that they truly cared about them. Barriers were broken and an alliance was predicated by assured hope. The Vietnamese people literally took the Marines in and in some cases considered them their own. The people felt a strong sense of guardianship towards the Marines and developed a sense of emotional responsibility for them. This attitude helped save many Marines lives.<sup>29</sup>

For the Marines it allowed them to get involved, be responsible, and feel personally involved with their one piece of the war. By being assigned to one area of responsibility (AOR) it allowed them to know, understand and become very familiar with the terrain in which they were conducting operations. It gave them a cause, purpose, and a sense of understanding that what they were doing in Vietnam was going to make a difference.

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<sup>29</sup> The Village by F.J. West and Cap Mot by B. L. Goodson give daily accounts on the life of a Marine in the village and on patrols. The PF's and the Marines relied and took watch over each other in the same Semper Paratus tradition that is practiced throughout all the services. Given time the Marine squad leader or team leader could rely on that PF soldier as a fellow brother in arms. The same shield /safeguard attitude was exercised by the women, children and men in the village. If you prevented a US Marine from stepping on a mine or passed information that result in preventing the loss of his life or that of his team you were favorably looked upon and rewarded by the chief and other village members.

The Combined Action Program made the efforts of the riflemen rewarding; it justified their presence in Vietnam. That justification was not always their fellow Marine, but the lives of the Vietnamese people that they ate and worked along side of every day. In the months that the Marines spent in the Combined Action Program, it made the war human. The center of gravity for the CAP was the established relationship between the Marines, villagers and the PF's.

### **Long term effect on the CAP**

The success of the Combined Action Program relied on many things but none of those factors was as important as the individual Marine and his actions. The program hinged on his understanding of a complex situation. The Commanding Officer was tasking the young Marine to exercise his combat role in conjunction with a diplomatic/humanitarian role in which he was never trained for. From the first day of boot camp he was introduced to terms like "Luke the gook and yellow eyes"! Throughout a Marines military development, the Vietnamese people, north and south, were saddled with negative connotations that he would have to overcome in order to best represent his unit and the Marine Corps.

Although the program was designed to select only the best Marines, commanders were not always willing to depart with their most qualified man. After all, they still had a mission of their own to complete and giving up their best men would not help them accomplish it any easier. Thus, often Marines with less than good credentials were sent and accepted into the program. Despite the ability to overcome many obstacles like language, integration of popular forces and the Tet Offensive, the Combined Action

Program started to lose its magnitude in the fall of 1969. Lt. General Krulak had retired and Lt. General Walt returned to the United States to become the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. The program had the same significance to the new III Marine Amphibious Force Commander Lt. General Cushman who assumed command in the fall of 1967 however, the reinforcement of Khe Sanh combat base and the 1968 Tet Offensive were Cushman's main concerns. In fairness to Lt. General Cushman, Ambassador Komer wanted to push ahead with Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support; a program that reduced the role of Marine pacification.<sup>30</sup>

Lt. Colonel Corson, who legitimized the Combined Action Program for Lt. General Walt, also return to the states in the fall of 1967 upon completing his tour. Under sound leadership and perseverance, the CAP had come a long way. It now maintained an established T/O and T/E and produced physical evidence of reduced Viet Cong activity within the areas of the program. However, the vision of Marine pacification left with those three leaders and no one was left to professionally oppose Westmoreland and Komer. Neither man really embraced the Combined Action Program from its conception. If Krulak was right about combating the spread of communism through the use of existing troops, then Westmoreland and Komer were wrong about their approach.<sup>31</sup> "General Krulak had an abrasive personality and it rubbed the keepers of conventional wisdom the wrong way. He believed that the success of the CAP threatened the ability for Komer's CORDS program to get off the ground."<sup>32</sup> The attitude from the Army/Joint General Staff about the CAP was that if General Krulak

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<sup>30</sup> Shulimson, U.S. Marines in Vietnam, p 619

<sup>31</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 177

<sup>32</sup> Ibid,

“wanted to play around with such foolishness he would have to eat the personnel spaces out of his hide. No additional Marines were ever to be made available to support combined action. We’ll starve him out!”<sup>33</sup> General Westmoreland and Ambassador Komer wanted the Marines to establish a Mobile Combined Action Program and call it Mobile Assist Teams (MAT). The difference was that the Marines would not be limited to one hamlet and live among the people, but move around and be responsible for a larger area, and a group of hamlets. This idea went against the Marines principle point that the moment that they left a village or hamlet the Viet Cong would move back in and all of their efforts would be lost. They would lose support of the people if they [Vietnamese] knew that they did not have twenty-four hour support and protection from the Marines. As a result of Komer’s persistence the Combined Action Program was officially disbanded in 1970. A few units still organized and conducted their assigned mission under the CAP philosophy until the Marines evacuated Vietnam in 1973.

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<sup>33</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p178 This was the overwhelming attitude of General Westmoreland's staff.



## Chapter 3

### Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support

In 1967 Presidential Advisor Robert W. Komer was appointed the head of Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) under MACV. Mr. Komer's plan was to establish a sound structure for Civil Development and Major General George Forsythe (USA) was appointed, as Komer's assistant in helping him to revamp the pacification effort.<sup>34</sup> Mr. Komer believed that all civil action needed to fall under centralized control in order to be able to track its progress effectively. It was Komer's opinion that "not until CORDS was formed "did a major sustained pacification effort begin to take place."<sup>35</sup> The Marines effort, despite the statistics was "only a sustained experiment".<sup>36</sup> Komer began to reorganize his civil development project into civilian and military teams that would operate within 250 districts and 44 provinces.<sup>37</sup>

The teams, comprised of fifty-nine men each were quickly trained and moved into the villages soon after US forces secured it.<sup>38</sup> The civilian- military teams contained members of Vietnam local law enforcement, ARVN, American forces and US civilians from various agencies.<sup>39</sup> They were tasked with reconstruction of social, political and

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<sup>34</sup> Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p 215

<sup>35</sup> Robert J. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U. S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), p 41 and 117-19 (hereafter Komer)

<sup>36</sup> Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U. S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* p 113

<sup>37</sup> Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U. S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* p 41 and 117- 119

<sup>38</sup> Lt. Col. Samuel W. Smithers, Jr. , USA, (retired), *Combat Units in Revolutionary Development*, (Military Review, October 1967), p 38 (hereafter Smithers)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

economic development.<sup>40</sup> The CORDS program was not something new, as similar programs under various agencies and names had been employed since the start of the American advisory roles.

The United States Agency for International Development, the United States Information Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the State Department were just a few of the civilian agencies involved in pacification.<sup>41</sup> From fertilizer distribution to political restructuring within the villages, each had programs involved in getting South Vietnam back on its feet.<sup>42</sup> The absence of someone in charge over the entire pacification effort coupled with the lack of communication between agencies resulted in failed endeavors in helping the South Vietnamese people help themselves. In many cases efforts were duplicated, while other pacification roles were ignored. Often an agency assumed that certain provisions were being handled in support of their effort by another agency, only to learn that coordination at the top level was never managed. These assumptions proved to be counterproductive to the various agencies as well as the military that would secure a village today, provide relief tomorrow, only to see the reemergence of Vietcong supporters/sympathizers within a week. Many of the programs were canceled or abandoned as a result. The CORDS program meant a lot of things, but most of all to the military units involved, it meant financial support for the pacification effort and every commander was looking to be the test case. Previously, commanders received some support but for the most part they were operating out of their unit funds to accomplish the mission. The CORDS program also meant additional personnel

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Corson , The Betrayal, p 201

<sup>42</sup> Corson , The Betrayal, p 205

support, and this proved to be a valuable resource to all units who continually found themselves short of men to accomplish the mission. The Marines had been conducting pacification for two years and making progress, however, the support and backing from the CORDS program would lessen some of the obstacles that they faced in the past.

The Marines quickly became aware that of the forty-four provinces that Komer selected for CORDS, only one, Quang Ngai, was within the Marines Tactical Area of Operation or I Corps.<sup>43</sup> Common sense would have indicated that the best way to test CORDS would be within the areas where the Marines had boasted success. This was not the line of thought Ambassador Komer had. The Marines would have to continue the Combined Action Program, the same program that influenced MACV and his staff to establish CORDS, without any additional support. The Commandant, General Green, suggested that Lt. General Krulak speak to Ambassador Komer to find out why the Marines were excluded from having teams assigned to the rest of their province.<sup>44</sup> Komer promised that more teams and funding would be allocated to the Marines in the following year, 1968.

In addition to Ambassador Komer not keeping his word, the Marines received less money and development teams per their AOR compared to the army units.<sup>45</sup> By his actions Ambassador Komer wanted the CAP to fade away. The Marines operation was over shadowing what Komer was trying to accomplish.

Ambassador Komer's CORDS had many programs and responsibilities, however, in order to monitor, and provide appropriate resources adequately, he had to have a system

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<sup>43</sup> Shulimson, U. S. Marines in Vietnam, p 600

<sup>44</sup> Shulimson, U. S. Marines in Vietnam, p 601

<sup>45</sup> Shulimson, U. S. Marines in Vietnam, p 602

to identify the progress of such programs. Komer implement the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) to evaluate the development of his programs, which detailed the progress of pacification within a hamlet.<sup>46</sup> HES was supposed to assess problem areas *effectively* for 12,600 hamlets throughout the region. According to Komer, HES was “a system for detailed monthly evaluation of pacification on a hamlet by hamlet basis, identifying problem areas for management attrition and monitoring a hamlet/population database.”<sup>47</sup> What Komer and his staff did not figure in was demographics; population, average income, average age, education, etc, items that should be factored in when collecting data of this type. Subsequently the data did not produce accurate information or a clear picture on Vietcong activity and its effect on the population.<sup>48</sup>

The results of the data were supposed to address two main areas, security and development with sub-areas exploring the specifics.

## **SECURITY**

### Vietcong Military Activities

- Village guerrilla unit
- External forces
- Military incidents affecting hamlets

### Vietcong Political and Subversive Activities

- Hamlet infrastructure
- Village infrastructure
- Activities affecting hamlet

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<sup>46</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 232

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Corsons chapter 10, p231-242, gives many examples of how the information was misinterrupted. He argues that it was obvious that the raw data collected was incorrect, nevertheless Komer published the information. “ (1) He really believed it. (2) He wanted to spare the American people from another failed attempt of gaining control of the war. (3) It was meant to gain time until they figured out what went wrong.”

Security (Friendly Capabilities)

Hamlet defense plan and organization  
Friendly external force assistance  
Internal security activities

**DEVELOPMENT**

Administration and Political Activities

GVN government management  
Census grievance information  
Information/Psyop activities

Health, Education and Welfare

Medical services and sanitation  
Education  
Welfare

Economic Development

Self-help activity  
Public Works  
Economic improvement programs<sup>49</sup>

The data was collected in the field by the district advisory team and processed in a central computer. A rating of “A” through “E” was assigned to establish the level of pacification that that hamlet was at. Hamlets graded “A”, “B” or “C” were considered secure, with “A” being the most secure or free from all Vietcong influence. Grades of “D” and “E” reflected Vietcong affiliation of various degrees.<sup>50</sup> Each team had between fifty to one hundred hamlets within their district. Problems eventually arose when it was discovered that the district teams did not have the ability/ resources to collect data from

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<sup>49</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 233

<sup>50</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 235

more than about four hamlets per month. This obviously led to the teams falsifying data for hamlets that were never surveyed.<sup>51</sup>

Komer failed to establish guidelines for collection; much of the collection was left up to the interpretation of the collector. The third problem was that unlike the Combined Action Marines, the teams did not reside within the village. Their collected data was gathered from a thirty minute to an hour meeting with the Vietnamese people each month. A snap shot picture is all that was achieved under the Hamlet Evaluation System. There was no personal bond or relationship established under this new program. The language barrier and lack of education in economics, political science, and sociology only complicated the grading system for the collection teams.<sup>52</sup> The U.S. civilians were not always suited to perform their duties effectively. The sixth and most obvious problem had to do with the district teams themselves and how they reported the data. Anytime performance is tied to statistics there is the possibility of padding the numbers so that the unit or organization does not look like it has failed the mission. No one wants to be the worst performer within the group.

In the survey under the title heading of SECURITY, paragraph, Vietcong Military Activities, subparagraph, Military incidents affecting Hamlets, how does a collector assess a letter grade for Vietcong activity? How does the collector determine how much or how little it affected the hamlet? Does he assess a grade based on how many were wounded or killed? How does one assign a grade to personal threats to a Vietnamese farmer who did not have enough rice for a Vietcong unit? Is it the same grade for a little

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<sup>51</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 233

<sup>52</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 234

girl who lost her leg because she stepped on a mine? And does the collector of other districts award the same letter values?

Improper phrasing and subjective wording within the survey allowed for misinterpretation by the collector and resulted in erroneous data. What was the collector's operational definition of *secure*, and what was the determining factor in establishing if a hamlet was secure? Over the course of several months' surveys in the Quang Nqai province showed that the number of able men within the province received a letter grade of "C". "In August 1967 that grade was raised to a "B", because of the lack of "Vietcong initiated incidents" (shootings) during the preceding month".<sup>53</sup> What the district collector knew and did not feel was important enough to record, was that all able males from the village were marched away under gunpoint, by the Vietcong.<sup>54</sup> His rating of "B" was not a true representation of the success of pacification within that village, and his actions would cause higher authority to make decisions and take actions, which would further incapacitate that village.

Somewhere the Hamlet Evaluation System lost its focus of the problem. Ambassador Komer did not really know what was going on, and CORDS got away from the Vietnamese helping Vietnamese. It was the responsibility of the Vietnamese government to help and educate the rural population with American support, not the other way around. The two biggest problems with CORDS was that it removed the emotion from the pacification process by relying on *rented* Vietnamese and American civilians who had no stake in achieving results. Secondly, CORDS had too much

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<sup>53</sup> Corson, The Betrayal, p 238

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., The author points out that when he informed the collector about the situation, the collector's response was "according to the instructions there had been no Vietcong military activity."

confidence in a computer program that they thought would give them the answer they were looking for. This was Komer's whole approach to the war: data and statistics!



## Chapter 4

### CAP vs CORDS

Similar to Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support, the Combined Action Program maintained statistics in order to evaluate its effectiveness, but contradiction among various sources raises some about its validity. The fact is, CAP data was collected by Marines that believed strongly in their approach and CORDS data was collected and maintained by civilians and army personnel who equally believed that their approach to pacification was right. Can pacification be measured effectively through a grading system of kill ratios, civilian sympathizers and census grievance information? If a system was in wouldn't a better representation of progress be accurately portrayed over a longer period of time, such as 10, 15 or 20 years? Computer information may not be an effective means in determining who is pacified and who is not, and through more recent experiences the United States has also learned that there is no quick solution to civil-military intervention (eg; Somalia).

It would be unfair to judge the Combined Action Program against the Civil Revolutionary Development Support, the programs served two different causes. Ambassador Komer and General Westmoreland did not consider what the Marines were doing [CAP] as pacification.<sup>55</sup> In Major Michael Weltcsch thesis "The Future role of The Combined Action Program" he raises a question of "was CAP a force multiplier in

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<sup>55</sup> Komer, Bureaucracy at War: U. S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict p 41

which by investing a limited amount of personnel a greater benefit was achieved; or could the resources channeled to CAP have been better used elsewhere"?<sup>56</sup>

One approach is that the Combined Action Program could have enhanced Pacification and Search and Destroy operations. Throughout this paper it has been pointed out that General Westmoreland and Ambassador Komer believed that the Marines could have been better served in another capacity. What Westmoreland and Komer failed to realize is that CAP's emphasis was on a tactical level and could have only strengthen their [Westmoreland and Komer] operational objectives. Historically it has been individual action and small unit actions, which have contributed greatly to the success of the overall plan. If given the support needed, CAP could have been the perfect example of small forces in support of the larger operational goal.

Westmoreland's operational goal was search and destroy. It would have been very beneficial to MACV to support, strategically assign and incorporated CAP units<sup>57</sup> in his S&D concept.

One example of how CAP could have assisted in search and destroy is force projection. The Viet Cong had the unlimited ability to project their forces when they wanted and where they wanted. With their endless pool of South Vietnamese men they

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Weltsch, Major The Future Role of the Combined Action Program Thesis, Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 1991

<sup>57</sup> Not all the Marine units were utilized as CAP's. In fact within a province CAP Marines secured some of the hamlets and other hamlets simply were incorporated within a unit's TAOR and did not receive the benefit of having Marines permanently stationed in their hamlet. Because some units were given conventional missions and others had the flexibility to exercise hamlet occupation the Viet Cong would avoid the occupied hamlets and terrorize the unoccupied ones. The reason for this is that not all units had the manpower to employ CAP. The size of their TAOR and mission also figured into the problem. It was not uncommon for a battalion to defend a series of hills that appeared to have little to no tactical or operational value. Instead of moving off the hill and defending within the hamlets. There were 36 squads in a four company battalion, with augments from the headquarters, a T/O battalion could occupy about 40 hamlets and still have enough men to effectively run the battalion and have a reserve/replacement pool.

did not have to worry about limited engagements, battle fatigue, or casualty replacement. As long as hamlets were unguarded there was no restriction on their projected force. When Westmoreland did destroy them [Viet Cong], South Vietnamese men who were forced to fight, quickly replaced them. There is documented proof that hamlets occupied by Marines did not lose men to the Viet Cong. Even if data and percentages were exaggerated, the fact is is that the Viet Cong were more likely to abduct new recruits from an unoccupied hamlet vice a hamlet occupied by Marines. To raid a CAP hamlet in an effort to abduct recruits, with the possibility of losing their own men, would be senseless. A person would think that this alone would be important to the general and lend reason for his support of the program.

Intelligence was another warfighting function that units struggled with during Vietnam. There are several accounts about the inability to locate the Viet Cong and ascertain what he was doing or planing to do. General Westmoreland's concept of "Search and Destroy" sums up his staffs' ineffectiveness to locate the enemy through intelligence gathering. If they had control of the situation, coupled with their superior firepower and ability to project forces Americans would have spent the majority of their efforts destroying the enemy and not searching for him. If logic prevails, the CAP was his best human intelligence (Humint) collection source.

The Popular Forces soldier knew every person in his community by face and name; he knew each rice patty, field, trail, bush, or bamboo clump, each family shelter, tunnel, and buried rice urn. He knew in most cases the local Viet Cong guerrilla band, and it was not uncommon for him to be related to one or more of them by blood or other family ties.<sup>58</sup>

The Marines experienced first hand the value of the Popular Forces and the

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<sup>58</sup> Lt. General Lewis W. Walt, *Strange War Strange Land*, (New York, NY; Funk and Wagnals 1970) p 106

information that they possessed about the area and the enemy. As previously mentioned if Westmoreland could have been able to harvest some of this information to serve his larger operational goals by supporting the efforts of the Marines. Instead the Marines worked on their side of the street and the Army worked on theirs.

CORDS mission was to help reestablish legitimate respected government control through social, economic and political reform. A supported and incorporated CAP would have given Komer a better environment in which to operate one hamlet at a time. Because of the animosity that Komer had towards the CAP, these programs were spread throughout South Vietnam mainly in areas without Marines. If he had concentrated on a unity of effort instead of segregation, his programs might have reached better success.. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Komer viewed CAP as a threat to his grand plan to save the South Vietnamese people. Had reforms started with CAP hamlets, other hamlets and districts would have seen the benefits of working with the Americans. The South Vietnamese people would have wanted to be recipients of civil development, agriculture support, monetary handouts, and medical attention. His programs would have served as incentives/ rewards. Marines were in the best position to identify those hamlets that had taken a concerned interest in establishing hamlet security and choosing to isolate themselves from the Viet Cong. Komer's Hamlet Evaluation System only proved that he underestimated the South Vietnamese people. They reported what they knew he and his team of experts wanted to hear in order to receive their weekly support, while still sympathizing with the V.C.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

It is erroneous to think that military defeat pure and simple will be a final solution. Unless the *population* has been weaned away from the guerrilla and his cause, unless reforms and re-education have attacked the psychological base of guerrilla action, unless the political network backing him up has been destroyed, military defeat is only a pause and fighting can easily erupt again. The worst military mistake in fighting guerrillas is to treat them as if they were conventional opponents. In the long run, the ability to control certain pieces of ground, or to mount periodic expeditions into and out of a particular area, means little in this sort of warfare.

Peter Paret and John Shy, *Guerrillas in the 1960's*

Vietnam was an inherently dangerous situation created by a lack of strategic goals and foreign policy. It was a clear case of the Johnson Administration jumping into something before it knew what it was getting into. Both President Johnson and General Westmoreland failed to realize that this was a guerrilla war, with family members on both sides. This war had deep roots and did not start with the arrival of American advisors or the colonization by the French or the Japanese. The plight of the Vietnamese people started with the dominance of the Chinese Dynasty. The Vietnamese people had been struggling for independence for over a century and simply wanted the right to live in peace and have a future for their children.

As outlined earlier, Generals Krulak and Walt identified the conflict as a "Maoist model" and understood what it would take to *contain* communism, while General Westmoreland and the Johnson Administration wanted to search, fix it, and *destroy* it

quickly. The three phases of the Maoist model consisted of: (1) recruitment of supporters and organizing a political and military structure; (2) raids, guerrilla actions against the government and combatants (ARVN and U.S. personnel) and terrorist actions against non-sympathizers; (3) large scale conventional warfare. The Vietnamese had been in phase one (recruitment and organization) since 1945 when the French began campaigning to reconquer Vietnam after the Japanese surrendered. By 1950 when the first American Advisors arrived in the South, the Viet Minh had already moved to phase two (guerrilla actions) against the French. After General Westmoreland's appointment as COMUSMACV in 1964, he began mass bombing efforts against targets north of the 17th parallel and also implemented a search and destroy concept when combat forces arrived in 1965, however, this was not the right action against phase (2) of the North Vietnam Strategy. In the eyes of the Vietnamese people, particularly the South, the arrival of Americans gave the appearance of another colonization effort and supported all the philosophies that the insurgents had professed. The mass mobilization of American forces only strengthened Ho Chi Minh's cause.

With an unstable and corrupt South Vietnamese Government, the support from the people is what was needed before warfare (conventional or non-conventional) was adopted. General Krulak and the Marines saw merit in controlling the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong by winning the peoples alliance. Unfortunately, the Combined Action Program did not receive the support it needed to continue to be successful. It appeared to be the perfect solution to an unpopular situation but the "other war" was a secondary priority for Westmoreland. The Marines were best suited for the mission of pacification; its senior leadership was familiar with the concept; the Marines had been involved with pacification, before and finally the Marines did not

possess the size or the logistical support to deploy and effectively operate on extended full-scale search and destroy missions.

By 1966 the North Vietnamese were operating between phase (2) raids, bombings and guerrilla actions and phase (3) organized conventional warfare while the Americans were bombing and destroying the countryside (Westmoreland) and handing out rice and conducting patriotism classes (Komer). What good was a civil-military program (CORDS) if the political infrastructure was fragmented and viewed by the people as the puppets (GVN) for the Americans? Because the NVA was operating back and forth between phase (2) and (3) of the Maoist model, the operations that the CAP were conducting was the right answer. CORDS *may* have won in Saigon, Hue and Da Nang, but it did not have a chance on the hamlet/village level. Vietnam was a small war scenario and had to be addressed from the bottom up and not the top down. Neither General Westmoreland nor Ambassador Komer ever denied that the Marines had success with the program however, they just chose not give it the support it needed to continue to be successful.

CORDS in many respects was a larger scale CAP minus the culture sensitivity and personal relations that the Marines were involved with. Ambassador Komer honestly believed that if the Marines could achieve success on the village and hamlet level, a larger scale program would produce quicker results. President Johnson, General Westmoreland and Ambassador Komer were interested in getting it [Vietnam] over with quickly, while the Marines were concerned about making a difference and getting it done right. Whether the United States should have committed combat troops in Vietnam

will continue to be debated for years to come. The fact is is that the United States was involved in a situation that had no clear strategy or end state. To paraphrase Barbara Tuchman, Vietnam was a problem for which there was no American solution<sup>59</sup> however, something had to be done and the Marines were doing it.

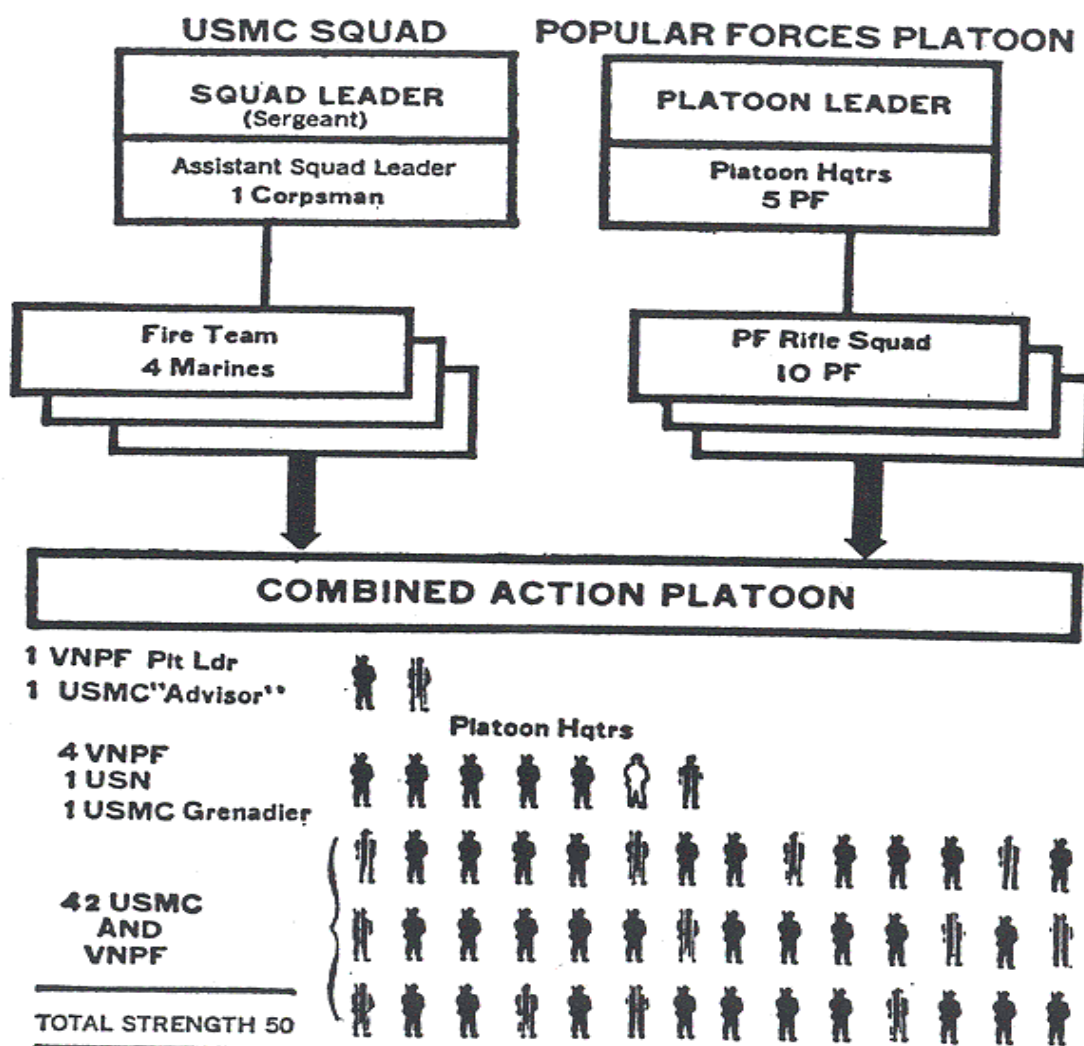
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<sup>59</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman The March of Folly: from Troy to Vietnam (New York, NY: Knopf Inc.,1984) p 374



## Appendix

### COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION OF A COMBINED ACTION PLATOON



## Acronyms

AOR	Area of Responsibility
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South)
CAC	Combined Action Company
CAG	Combined Action Group
CAP	Combined Action Program
CAP	Combined Action Platoon
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CORDS	Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support
FMFPac	Fleet Marine Force Pacific
GVN	Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
JAP	Joint Action Platoon
MACV	Military Assistance Command to Vietnam
MACV	Military Advisory Command to Vietnam
MACV	Military Advisory Commander to Vietnam (Gen. Westmoreland)
MAT	Mobile Assist Team
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PF	Popular Forces
Sqldr	Squad Leader
TAOR	Tactical Area of Responsibility
T/E	Table of equipment

Tmlr	Team Leader
T/O	Table of Organization
USID	United States Information Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VC	Viet Cong

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